



News Release

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Fair time has arrived — simple precautions keep it fun and healthy

Cardinal rule when touching animals — always wash hands

OLYMPIA — Fair season is here and state health officials are reminding people to have a good time seeing animals close-up at petting zoos and educational farms, but don't get sick from them.

Many animals carry harmful bacteria that can make people ill. Children are particularly likely to get these bacterial infections. Parents should make sure kids wash or sanitize their hands immediately after contact with animals or other surfaces with which animals have been in contact. Never leave kids unattended with animals; supervise them to avoid injury and illness. Don't let children eat in animal exhibit areas.

Animals don't have to be sick themselves to carry bacteria, so you may not see any signs of illness. Some bacteria can live for months or years in animal bedding, flooring, barriers, surfaces, clothing, and shoes that they touch. An animal's fur, skin, and saliva can harbor bacteria, and they can then be passed to people who pet, touch, feed, or are licked by animals. Bacteria from animals can also contaminate surfaces of toys, strollers, bottles, or other items that might be dropped on exhibit floors or come into contact with animals.

Some of the bacteria responsible for disease outbreaks are *E. coli*, *Salmonella*, *Cryptosporidium*, and *Campylobacter*. These infections can be severe, particularly in young children. Although reports often document cattle, sheep, or goats as infection sources, poultry, rodents, reptiles, and other domestic and wild animals are potential sources of infection as well.

The most common element in illness outbreaks from direct animal contact is inadequate hand washing. Since 1996, there have been about 100 disease outbreaks nationwide involving animals in public settings according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Some recent outbreaks in Washington include a Pierce County petting farm (July 2004), a King County farm

camp (June 2005), Whatcom and Clark County fairs (August 2005), and the Puyallup State Fair (September 2007).

A few simple steps during and after a visit to a live animal exhibit can help ensure the benefits of experiencing animal contact aren't overshadowed by resulting illness. Always remember to wash your hands using soap and water before leaving the animal area; use hand sanitizer if hand washing facilities aren't available. Don't take food, toys, pacifiers, and baby bottles into the animal areas. Even strollers can pick-up bacteria from animal areas and later be a source of contamination for children, so consider leaving strollers outside when visiting these areas. Taking these precautions will ensure that your family's trip to the fair this summer will be remembered as a fun and healthy one.

More information about preventing animal diseases is on the [Department of Health website](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/ZOO.HTM) (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/ZOO.HTM>).

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Visit the Washington Department of Health website at http://www.doh.wa.gov for <i>a healthy dose of information</i> .
